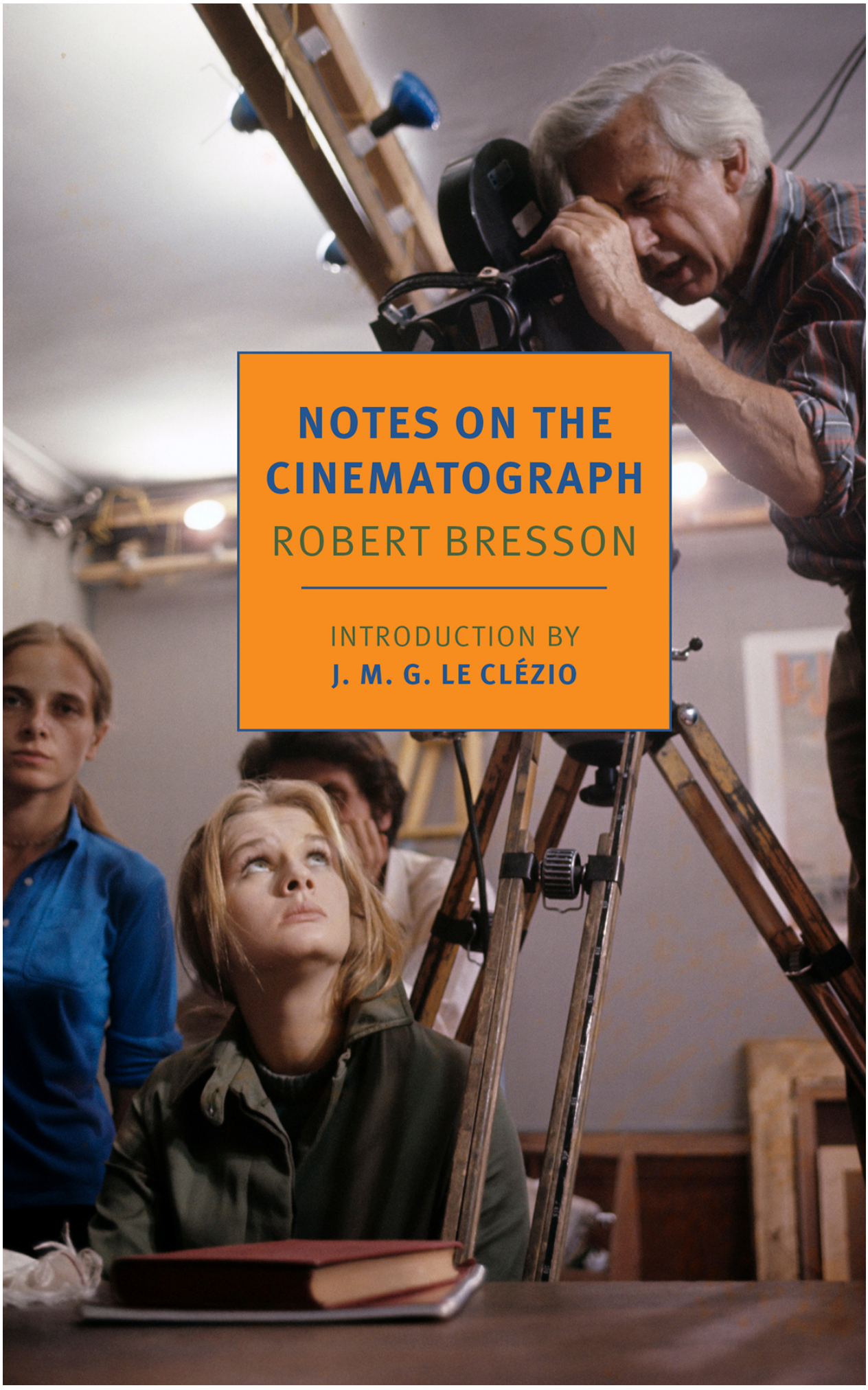

NOTES ON THE CINEMATOGRAPH

ROBERT BRESSON

INTRODUCTION BY
J. M. G. LE CLÉZIO

ROBERT BRESSON (1901–1999) was born in Bromont-Lamothe, France. He attended the Lycée Lakanal in Sceaux, and moved to Paris after graduation, hoping to become a painter. He directed a short comedy, *Affaires publiques*, in 1934, but his work was curtailed by the outbreak of World War II. He enlisted in the French army in 1939 and was captured in 1940, spending a year in a labor camp as a prisoner of war. After his release he returned to Paris and directed *Angels of Sin* (1943), his first full-length film, under the German occupation. *Les dames du Bois de Boulogne* followed in 1945, and in 1951 *Diary of a Country Priest* was met with widespread acclaim. His next film, *A Man Escaped* (1956), which follows the memoirs of André Devigny, a French Resistance leader incarcerated during World War II, became a hit. He made eleven more films over the next three decades, including *Mouchette* (adapted from the Georges Bernanos novel of the same name, published as an NYRB Classic); *Au Hasard Balthazar*; *Pickpocket*; *Lancelot of the Lake*; and *L'Argent*. Throughout his career Bresson eschewed the use of theatrical techniques and employed nonprofessional actors whom he referred to as models. Raised in the Catholic faith, he worked on and off throughout his career on an adaptation of the book of Genesis, which never saw fruition. He died in Droue-sur-Drouette at the age of ninety-eight.

Robert Bresson's interviews, edited by Mylène Bresson, are collected in *Bresson on Bresson*, published by New York Review Books.

JONATHAN GRIFFIN (1906–1990) served as the director of BBC European Intelligence during World War II. Among the authors he has translated are Jean Giono, Fernando Pessoa, and Nikos Kazantzakis. A collection of Griffin's poetry, *In Earthlight*, was published in 1995.

J. M. G. LE CLÉZIO was born in Nice in 1940. He has written more than forty books, including works of fiction and memoir as well as collections of essays and books for children. In 2008 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

NOTES ON THE CINEMATOGRAPH

ROBERT BRESSON

Translated from the French by

JONATHAN GRIFFIN

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INTRODUCTION

THIS IS the other face of creation, where the energy of life coming from this continuous flow of images, from the *Diary of a Country Priest* to *Lancelot*, and from *Joan of Arc* to *L'Argent*, is marked by small touches, sketches, flashes. Year after year, Robert Bresson is asking the same questions. Questions about the actor and the model, about the use of this immature art which others call cinema, and to which he tries to give the difficult name of cinematography (the original magic of the Lumière brothers, when people were amazed to see the trees because "their leaves were moving").

What are these questions for? For provocation, for reflexion, for wisdom? They are for the invention of a new language, for perfection.

The film-maker (Bresson insists on the fundamental difference between the creator in cinematography and the *metteur-en-scène*, the director, still prisoner of concepts coming from the theatre and the stage) is not a ruler on some fake creation. He is a man, just a man, trying desperately, from all his heart, to expel and give shape to the feelings of his senses. A man, not a god, not an actor.

In his log-book, Robert Bresson writes down, in concise words, his discoveries. This is what a man is made of: likings and dislikings. Mainly his disliking for vanity, intellectualism, conformism. His liking for sincerity, for nature (the good nature of Joan of Arc among her tormentors), for economy and precision in art. The being, as opposed to the seeming, meaning the model as opposed to the actor. The model (a word Bresson prefers to the commonplace of "actor") is exaltation, inspiration for the painter: "*soul, body, inimitable.*"

We read here, in these brief notes, written almost casually, the essence of this extremely strong and exacting adventure, which has led Bresson to the firmament of film-making. Everything is perceivable in these words, of his desire for exactitude, of his obsession with perfection, as well as the continuous fight against compromises and vulgarity, against the power of money. Do we realize what courage and obstinacy it requires for Bresson to struggle, after all these years, for his project of *Genesis*?

"*The true is inimitable, the false, untransformable*." To Bresson, art is the only possible escape from the bitterness of impotence. But it is also much more. Its gives way to the only visible part of the being, its merging part. This is why Bresson is so close to the art of painting. The real image is what is hidden in a painting. We think of the great Impressionists and of Matisse. Reading these notes, we may think also of oriental artists, Hokusai for example, in connection with Zen Buddhism. There is the same sense of economy, the same liking for what is sensual, and the same play on all the senses. Life drifting, in its continuous, unpredictable flow. Life inimitable. Japanese Buddhism teaches us that art (or bliss) is surprise, it cannot be calculated. It is a prey, a catch: *"Be as ignorant of what you are going to catch as a fisherman of what is at the end of his fishing rod"* (the fish that arises from nowhere).

Now, we know that Robert Bresson has nothing to do with classicism (as *Lancelot* and *L'Argent* made obvious). His work is above all the exploration of the senses. Truth, beauty, each part of our divine mystery, is perceived by these feeble and easy-to-cheat openings. Truth is fragile, and this is why it is so necessary to be vigilant.

Year after year, Bresson is progressing alone, along his narrow, uneasy path. Each of his works is an enormous arc towards truth and perfection. This is why these notes are so valuable. They show the marks of all these years of hope and despair, learning and denial. They are profound and true like the marks on Robinson Crusoe's stick calendar. Notes, dreams, passions, meaning the complementarity of the body and the spirit, the language of shapes, the language of sounds.

"I have dreamed of my film-making itself as it goes along under my gaze, like a painter's eternally fresh canvas."

Dream: Bresson's dream to share the swarming, the over-plenty of life. His love for the human body, the human face, a young girl's nape, an arm, two feet steady on the ground.

"*The things one can express with the hand, with the head, with the shoulders*! . . . How many useless and encumbering words then disappear! What economy!"

In his hazardous, but rigorous quest, Robert Bresson teaches us the necessity of economy, and also the "voluptuousness" of creation. Art is not in the mind. Art is in the eye, in the ear, in the memory of our senses. Images, dreams. Bresson's desire for truth, through the exactitude of life. Yes, Mozart's words about his own concertos—"*They are brilliant* . . . Yet, they lack poverty"—are significant here.

Bresson's words have the same intensity. These words are more than notes from an experienced film-maker's diary. These words are scars, marks of suffering, they are gems. In our darkness (the night of

creation which has to come down before the screen becomes enlightened) they shine like stars, showing us the simple, troublesome way to perfection.

—J. M. G. Le Clézio

NOTES ON THE CINEMATOGRAPH

1950–1958

Rid myself of the accumulated errors and untruths. Get to know my resources, make sure of them.

•

The faculty of using my resources well diminishes when their number grows.

•

Master precision. Be a precision instrument myself.

•

Not have the soul of an executant (of my own projects). Find, for each shot, a new pungency over and above what I had imagined. Invention (re-invention) on the spot.

•

Metteur-en-scène, director. The point is not to direct someone, but to direct oneself.

•

No actors. (No directing of actors.)
No parts. (No learning of parts.)
No staging.
But the use of working models, taken from life.
BEING (models) instead of SEEMING (actors).

Human Models:

Movement from the exterior to the interior. (Actors: movement from the interior to the exterior.)
The thing that matters is not what they show me but what they hide from me and, above all, *what they do not suspect is in them*.
Between them and me: telepathic exchanges, divination.

•

(1925?) The TALKIE opens its doors to theatre which occupies the place and surrounds it with barbed wire.

•

Two types of film: those that employ the resources of the theatre (actors, direction, etc.) and use the camera in order to *reproduce*; those that employ the resources of cinematography and use the camera to *create*.

•

The terrible habit of theatre.

•

CINEMATOGRAPHY[1] IS A WRITING WITH IMAGES IN MOVEMENT AND WITH SOUNDS.

•

A film cannot be a stage show, because a stage show requires flesh-and-blood presence. But it can be,

as photographed theatre or CINEMA is, the photographic reproduction of a stage show. The photographic reproduction of a stage show is comparable to the photographic reproduction of a painting or of a sculpture. But a photographic reproduction of Donatello's *Saint John the Baptist* or of Vermeer's *Young Woman with Necklace* has not the power, the value or the price of that sculpture or that painting. It does not create it. Does not create anything.

•

CINEMA films are historical documents whose place is in the archives: how a play was acted in 19— by Mr. X, Miss Y.

•

An actor in cinematography might as well be in a foreign country. He does not speak its language.

•

The photographed theatre or CINEMA requires a *metteur-en-scène* or director to make some actors perform a play and to photograph these actors performing the play; afterwards he lines up the images. Bastard theatre lacking what makes theatre: material presence of living actors, direct action of the audience on the actors.

•

. . . *without lacking naturalness, they lack nature*.[2] —Chauteaubriand.
Nature: what the dramatic art suppresses in favour of a naturalness that is learned and maintained by exercises.

•

Nothing rings more false in a film than that natural tone of the theatre copying life and traced over studied sentiments.

•

To think it more natural for a movement to be made or a phrase said like this than like that is absurd, is meaningless in cinematography.

•

No possible relations between an actor and a tree. The two belong to different worlds. (A stage tree *simulates* a real tree.)

•

Respect man's nature without wishing it more palpable than it is.

•

No marriage of theatre and cinematography without both being exterminated.

•

Cinematographer's film where expression is obtained by relations of images and of sounds, and not by a mimicry done with gestures and intonations of voice (whether actors' or non-actors'). One that does not analyse or explain. That *re-composes*.

•

An image must be transformed by contact with other images as is a colour by contact with other colours. A blue is not the same blue beside a green, a yellow, a red. No art without transformation.

•

The truth of cinematography cannot be the truth of theatre, not the truth of the novel, nor the truth of painting. (What the cinematographer captures with his or her own resources cannot be what the theatre, the novel, painting capture with theirs).

•

Cinematographer's film where the images, like the words in a dictionary, have no power and value except through their position and relation.

•

If an image, looked at by itself, expresses something sharply, if it involves an interpretation, it will not be transformed on contact with other images. The other images will have no power over it, and it will have no power over the other images. Neither action, nor reaction. It is definitive and unusable in the cinematographer's system. (A system does not regulate everything. It is a bait for something.)

•

Apply myself to insignificant (non-significant) images.

•

Flatten my images (as if ironing them), *without attenuating them*.

•

On the choice of models

His voice draws for me his mouth, his eyes, his face, makes for me his complete portrait, outer and inner, better than if he were in front of me. The best deciphering got by the ear alone.

On Looks

Who said: "A single look lets loose a passion, a murder, a war"?

•

The ejaculatory force of the eye.

•

To set up a film is to bind persons to each other and to objects by looks.

•

Two persons, looking each other in the eye, see not their eyes but their looks. (The reason why we get the colour of a person's eyes wrong?)

•

On two deaths and three births

My movie is born first in my head, dies on paper; is resuscitated by the living persons and real objects I use, which are killed on film but, placed in a certain order and projected on to a screen, come to life again like flowers in water.[3]

•

To admit that X may be by turns Attila, Mahomet, a bank clerk, a lumberman, is to admit that the movies in which he acts smack of the stage. Not to admit that X acts is to admit that Attila = Mahomet = a bank clerk = a lumberman, which is absurd.

•

Applause during X's film. The impression of "theatre" irresistible.

•

A model. Enclosed in his mysterious appearance. He has brought home to him all of him that was outside. He is there, behind that forehead, those cheeks.

•

"Visible parlance" of bodies, objects, houses, roads, trees, fields.

•

To create is not to deform or invent persons and things. It is to tie new relationships between persons and things which are, and *as they are*.
Radically suppress *intentions* in your models.

•

To your models: "Don't think what you're saying, don't think what you're doing." And also: "Don't think *about* what you say, don't think *about* what you do."

•

Your imagination will aim less at events than at feelings, while wanting these latter to be as *documentary* as possible.

•

You will guide your models according to your rules, with them letting you act in them, and you letting them act in you.

•

One single mystery of persons and objects.

•

Not to use two violins when one is enough.[4]

•

Shooting. Put oneself into a state of intense ignorance and curiosity, and yet see things in *advance*.

•

One recognizes the true by its efficacy, by its power.

•

Passionate for the appropriate.

•

Expressive face of the actor on which the slightest crease, controlled by him and magnified by the lens, suggests the exaggerations of the *kabuki*.

•

Counter the high relief of theatre with the smoothness of cinematography.

•

The greater the success, the closer it verges upon failure (as a masterpiece of painting approaches the colour repro).

•

What happens in the joins. “The great battles,” General de M . . . used to say, “are nearly always begun at the points of intersection of the staff maps.”

•

Cinematography, a military art. Prepare a film like a battle.[5]

•

A whole made of good images can be detestable.

On True and False

The mixture of true and false yields falsity (photographed theatre or CINEMA).
The false when it is homogeneous can yield truth (theatre).

•

In a mixture of true and false, the true brings out the false, the false hinders belief in the true. An actor simulating fear of shipwreck on the deck of a real ship battered by a real storm—we believe neither in the actor, nor in the ship nor in the storm.

On Music

No music as accompaniment, support or reinforcement. *No music at all.*[6]

•

The noises must become music.

•

Shooting. No part of the unexpected which is not secretly expected by you.

•

Dig deep where you are. Don’t slip off elsewhere. Double, triple bottom to things.

•

Be sure of having used to the full all that is communicated by immobility and silence.

•

Draw from your models the proof that they exist with their oddities and their enigmas.

•

You shall call a fine film the one that gives you an exalted idea of cinematography.

•

No absolute value in an image.
Images and sounds will owe their value and their power solely to the use to which you destine them.

•

Model. Questioned (by the gestures you make him make, the words you make him say). Response (even when it’s only a refusal to respond) to something which often you do not perceive but your camera records. Submitted *later* to study by you.

On Automatism

Nine-tenths of our movements obey habit and automatism. It is anti-nature to subordinate them to will and to thought.

•

Models who have become automatic (everything weighed, measured, timed, repeated ten, twenty times) and are then dropped in the medium of the events of your film—their relations with the objects and persons around them will be *right*, because they will not be *thought*.

•

Models *automatically* inspired, inventive.

•

Your film—let people feel the soul and the heart there, but let it be made like a work of hands.

•

CINEMA draws on a common fund. The cinematographer is making a voyage of discovery on an unknown planet.

•

Where not everything is present, but each word, each look, each movement has things underlying.

•

Significant that X's film, shot at the seaside, on a beach, breathes the characteristic smell of the stage.

•

To shoot ex tempore, with unknown models, in unforeseen places of the right kind for keeping me in a tense state of alert.

•

Let it be the intimate union of the images that charges them with emotion.

•

Catch instants. Spontaneity, freshness.

•

How hide from oneself the fact that it all ends up on a rectangle of white fabric hung on a wall? (See your film as a surface to cover.)

•

X is imitating Napoleon, whose nature was not to imitate.

•

In ——, a film that smacks of the theatre, this great English actor keeps fluffing to make us believe that he is inventing his lines as he goes along. His efforts to render himself more alive do just the opposite.

•

A too-expected image (cliché) will never seem right, even if it is.

•

Set up your film while shooting. It forms for itself knots (of force, of security) to which all the rest clings.

•

What no human eye is capable of catching, no pencil, brush, pen of pinning down, your camera catches without knowing what it is, and pins it down with a machine's scrupulous indifference.

•

Immobility of X's film, whose camera runs, flies.

•

A sigh, a silence, a word, a sentence, a din, a hand, the whole of your model, his face, in repose, in movement, in profile, full face, an immense view, a restricted space . . . Each thing exactly in its place: your only resources.

•

A flood of words does a film no harm. A matter of kind, not quantity.
It would not be ridiculous to say to your models: "I am inventing you as you are."

•

The insensible bond, connecting your furthest apart and most different images, is your vision.

•

Don’t run after poetry. It penetrates unaided through the joins (ellipses).

•

X, an actor, uncertain like an uncertain colour made from two tones superimposed.

•

On the boards, acting adds to real presence, intensifies it. In films, acting does away with even the semblance of real presence, kills the illusion created by the photography.

•

(1954?) The GRANDS PRIX lunch. One-eyed man in the kingdom of the wilfully blind.
Where is my judgement fled That censures falsely what they see aright?

•

Let it be the feelings that bring about the events. Not the other way.

•

Cinematography: new way of writing, therefore of feeling.

•

Model. Two mobile eyes in a mobile head, itself on a mobile body.

•

Don’t let your backgrounds (avenues, squares, public gardens, subway) absorb the faces you are applying to them.

•

Model. Thrown into the physical action, his voice, starting from even syllables, takes on automatically the inflexions and modulations proper to his true nature.

•

In every art there is a diabolical principle which acts against it and tries to demolish it. An analogous principle is perhaps not altogether unfavourable to cinematography.

•

Forms that resemble ideas. Treat them as actual ideas.

•

Model. “All face.”[7]

•

Shooting

Wonderful chances, those that act with precision.[8] Way of putting aside the bad ones, to attract the good ones. To reserve for them, in advance, a place in your composition.

•

Actors, costumes, sets and stage furniture are bound to make one think at once of the stage. Take care that the persons and objects in my film may not make people think at once of the cinematographer.

•

Someone who can work with the minimum can work with the most. One who can with the most cannot, inevitably, with the minimum.

•

Shooting. Stick exclusively to impressions, to sensations. No intervention of intelligence which is foreign to these impressions and sensations.

•

The power your (flattened) images have of being other than they are. The same image brought in by ten different routes will be a different image ten times.

•

NEITHER THE DIRECTOR NOR SCENARIO-WRITER. FORGET YOU ARE MAKING A FILM.

•

Actor. The “to-and-fro of the character in front of his nature” forces the public to look for talent on his face, instead of the enigma peculiar to each living creature.

•

No intellectual or cerebral mechanism. Simply a mechanism.

•

If, on the screen, the mechanism disappears and the phrases you have made them say, the gestures you have made them make, have become one with your models, with your film, with you—then a miracle.

•

Unbalance so as to re-balance.

•

Hide the ideas, but so that people find them. The most important will be the most hidden.

•

Acting, which seems to have an existence of its own, apart, outside the actor; to be palpable.

On Poverty

Letter of Mozart’s, about some of his own concertos (K. 413, K. 414, K. 415): “They hold the happy mean between the too difficult and the too easy. They are brilliant . . . , but they miss poverty.”

•

Montaigne: *The movements of the soul were born with the same progression as those of the body.* [9]

•

Unusual approaches to bodies.
On the watch for the most imperceptible, the most inward movements.

•

Not artful, but agile.

•

Sudden rise of my film when I improvise, decline when I execute.

•

CINEMA seeks *immediate* and *definitive* expression through mimicry, gestures, intonations of voice. This system inevitably excludes expression through contacts and exchanges of images and of sounds and the transformations that result from them.

•

What has passed through one art and is still marked by it can no longer enter another.[10]

•

Impossible to express something strongly by the coupled resources of two arts. It is all the one or all the other.

•

Not to shoot a film in order to illustrate a thesis, or to display men and women confined to their external aspect, but to discover the matter they are made of. To attain that “heart of the heart” which does not let itself be caught either by poetry, or by philosophy, or by drama.

•

Images and sounds like people who make acquaintance on a journey and afterwards cannot separate.

•

Nothing too much, nothing deficient.

•

X’s film. Two wicked eyes, trying to be good; a bitter mouth made for silence, which never stops talking and contradicting the words as soon as said: *Star-system* in which men and women have a factual existence (as phantoms).

•

Charm of X’s film made of bric-a-brac.

•

As they are intended, CINEMA films can only use actors, films of cinematography models only.

•

Music takes up all the room and gives no increased value to the image to which it is added.

•

THE SOUNDTRACK INVENTED SILENCE.

•

Absolute silence and silence obtained by a *pianissimo* of noises.

•

X's film. Vociferations, roarings, as in the theatre.

•

Model. What you make known of yourself by coincidence with him.
Let each image, each sound exert its weight not only upon your film and your models, but upon you.

•

Draw the attention of the public (as we say that a chimney draws).

•

A small subject can provide the pretext for many profound combinations. Avoid subjects that are too vast or too remote, in which nothing warns you when you are going astray. Or else take from them only what can be mingled with your life and belongs to your experience.

•

Generality of music, which does not correspond to a film's generality. Exaltation that hinders the other exaltations.

•

"The devil hopped into his mouth" : don't have a devil hop into a mouth. "All husbands are ugly" : don't show a multitude of ugly husbands.

•

Of lighting

Things made more *visible* not by more light, but by the fresh angle at which I regard them.

•

Bring together things that have as yet never been brought together and did not seem predisposed to be so.

•

X's film, open on all sides. Dispersion.

•

Model. Over his features thoughts or feelings not materially expressed, rendered *visible* by intercommunication and interaction of two or several other images.

•

Neither inflation nor overloading.

•

Debussy himself used to play with the piano's lid down.

•

A single word, a single movement that is not right or is merely in the wrong place gets in the way of all the rest.

•

Rhythmic value of a noise

Noise of a door opening and shutting, noise of footsteps, etc., for the sake of rhythm.

•

A thing that has failed can, if you change its place, be a thing that has come off.

•

Model. His *permanence:* always the same way of being different.

•

An actor needs to get out of himself in order to see himself in *the other person*. *YOUR MODELS, ONCE OUTSIDE THEMSELVES, WILL NOT BE ABLE TO GET IN AGAIN*.

•

Reorganize the unorganized noises (what you think you hear is not what you hear) of a street, a railroad station, an airport . . . Play them back one by one in silence and adjust the blend.

•

Acting

The actor: "It's not me you are seeing and hearing, it's *the other man*." But being unable to be wholly *the other*, he is not that other.

•

CINEMA films controlled by intelligence, going no further.

•

Retouch some real with some real.

•

Model. His pure essence.

•

The exchanges that are produced between images and images, sounds and sounds, images and sounds, give the people and objects in your films their cinematographic life and, by a subtle phenomenon, unify your composition.

•

Images, conductors of the gaze. BUT THE ACTOR'S ACTING THROWS THE EYE.

•

With the Beaux-Arts, no rivalry.

•

Dismantle and put together till one gets *intensity*.

•

Don’t think of your film outside the resources you have made for yourself.

•

An actor coming from the theatre brings with him inevitably its conventions, its morality and *some duties towards his art*.

•

Make yourself homogeneous with your models, make them homogeneous with you.

•

Images chosen in prevision of their *inner* association.

•

Models mechanized externally, internally free. On their faces nothing wilful. *“The constant, the eternal beneath the accidental.”*

•

Be the first to see what you see as you see it.

•

Naïve barbarity of dubbing

Voices without reality, not conforming to the movement of the lips. They “have mistaken their mouth.”

•

Return the past to the present. Magic of the present.

•

Model. All those things you could not conceive of him *before*, or even *during*.

•

Model. Soul, body, both inimitable.

•

An old thing becomes new if you detach it from what usually surrounds it.

•

All those effects you can get from *repetition* (of an image, of a sound).

•

To find a kinship between image, sound and silence. To give them an air of being glad to be together, of having chosen their place. Milton: *Silence was pleased*.

•

Model. Reduce to the minimum the share his consciousness has. Tighten the meshing within which he cannot any longer not be him and where he can now do nothing that is not *useful*.

•

Images. Like the modulations in music.

•

Model. Withdrawn into himself. Of the little he lets escape, take *only what suits you*.

•

Model. His way of being inward. Unique, inimitable.

•

X's film. Contagion of literature: description by a succession of things (pans and travelling shots).

•

It does happen that the disorder of a film, because it is monotonous, deceives us, gives us the illusion of order. But it is a negative, sterile order. AT A RESPECTFUL DISTANCE FROM ORDER AND DISORDER.

•

Dig into your sensation. Look at what there is within. Don't analyse it with words. Translate it into sister images, into equivalent sounds. The clearer it is, the more your style affirms itself. (Style: all that is not technique.)

•

Shooting

Your film must resemble what you see on shutting your eyes. (You must be capable, at any instant, of seeing *and hearing* it entire.)

Sight and Hearing

To know thoroughly what business that sound (or that image) has there.

•

What is for the eye must not duplicate what is for the ear.

•

If the eye is entirely won, give nothing or almost nothing to the ear.[11] One cannot be at the same time all eye and all ear.

•

When a sound can replace an image, cut the image or neutralize it. The ear goes more towards the within, the eye towards the outer.

•

A sound must never come to the rescue of an image, nor an image to the rescue of a sound.

•

If a sound is the obligatory complement of an image, give preponderance either to the sound, or to the image. If equal, they damage or kill each other, as we say of colours.

•

Image and sound must not support each other, but must work each in turn through *a sort of relay*.

•

The eye solicited alone makes the ear impatient, the ear solicited alone makes the eye impatient. *Use these impatiences*. Power of the cinematographer who appeals to the two senses *in a governable way*.
Against the tactics of speed, of noise, set tactics of slowness, of silence.

•

——h, American (English?) film in which the two stars compete for the attention of the public. They impose an order on their features and never cease watching it. Waxwork aspect of their faces photographed in colour.

•

Model. Preserved from any obligation towards the art of drama.

•

On the stage a horse or dog that is not plaster or cardboard causes uneasiness. Unlike cinematography, looking for a truth in the real is fatal in the theatre.

•

Model. The cause which makes him say this sentence or make that movement is not in him, it is in you. The causes are not in the models. On the stage and in CINEMA films, the actor *must* make us believe that the cause is in him.

•

Everything escapes and disperses. Continually bring it all back to one.

•

The cinematographer's field is incommensurable. It gives you an unlimited power of creating.

•

Model. Don't just reduce or abolish the gap between you and him. Deep exploration.

•

Actors. The nearer they approach (on the screen) with their *expressiveness*, the further away they get.

Houses, trees come nearer; the actors go away.

•

Nothing more inelegant and ineffective than an art conceived in another art's form.

•

There is nothing to expect from a CINEMA anchored in the theatre.

•

Natural voice, trained voice

The voice, soul made flesh. Trained, as in X's case, it is no longer either soul or flesh. A precision instrument, but an instrument on its own.

•

To be constantly changing lenses in photographing is like constantly changing one's glasses.

•

Belief

Theatre and CINEMA: alternation of believing and not believing. Cinematography: continually believing.

•

Practice the precept: find without seeking.

•

Models. Letting themselves be led not by you, but by the words and gestures you make them say and do.

•

To your models: "One must not act either somebody else or oneself. One must not act *anybody*."

•

A thing expressible solely by the cinematographically new, therefore a new thing.

•

Simultaneous precision and imprecision of music. A thousand possible, *unforeseeable* sensations.

•

An actor draws from him what is not really there. Illusionist.

•

Avoid paroxysms (anger, terror, etc.) which one is obliged to simulate, and in which everybody is

alike.

•

Rhythms

The omnipotence of rhythms.
Nothing is durable but what is caught up in rhythms. Bend content to form and sense to rhythms.

Gestures and Words

Gestures and words cannot form the substance of a film as they form the substance of a stage play. But the substance of a film can be that . . . thing or those things which *provoke* the gestures and words and which are produced in some obscure way in your models. Your camera *sees* them and records them. So one escapes from the photographic reproduction of actors performing a play; and cinematography, that new writing, becomes at the same time a method of discovery.[12]

•

Your models, pitched into the action of your film, will get used to gestures they have repeated twenty times. The words they have learned with their lips will find, *without their minds taking part in this*, the inflections and the lilt proper to their true natures. A way of recovering the automatism of real life. (The talent of one or several actors or stars no longer comes into it. What matters is how you approach your models and the unknown and the virgin nature you manage to draw from them.)

•

One forgets too easily the difference between a man and his image, and that there is none between the sound of his voice on the screen and in real life.

•

Your models must not *lend* themselves to your (camera or microphone) take. Render their attitude (what is singular about it) easy for them.

•

Your film will have the beauty, or the sadness, or what have you, that one finds in a town, in a countryside, in a house, and not the beauty, sadness, etc. that one finds in the photograph of a town, a countryside, or a house.

•

IN THIS LANGUAGE OF IMAGES, ONE MUST LOSE COMPLETELY THE NOTION OF IMAGE. THE IMAGES MUST EXCLUDE THE IDEA OF IMAGE.

•

Voice and face

They have formed together and have grown used to each other.

•

Your film is not readymade. It *makes* itself as it goes along under your gaze. Images and sounds in a state of waiting and reserve.

•

Today[13] I was not present at a projection of images and of sounds; I was present at the visible and instantaneous action they were exerting on one another and at their transformation. The bewitched reel.

•

The distance Racine demands is the impassable distance which separates the stage from the audience. Distance of the play from reality, and not the distance of the writer from his model(s).

•

Formerly, Religion of the Beautiful and sublimation of the subject. Today the same noble aspirations: to scrape oneself clean of matter and realism, to emerge from vulgar imitation of nature. But the sublimation turns towards technique . . . The CINEMA falls between two stools. It cannot sublimate either the technique (photography) or the actors (whom it imitates as they are). Not absolutely realistic, because it is theatrical and conventional. Not absolutely theatrical and conventional because it is realistic.

•

The sight of movement gives happiness: horse, athlete, bird.

•

The actor projects himself before him in the form of the character he wants to seem; lends him his own body, face, voice; makes him sit down, stand up, walk; penetrates him with sentiments and passions he himself does not have. This “I” who is not his “I” is incompatible with cinematography.

•

From the beings and things of nature, washed clean of all art and especially of the art of drama, you will make an art.

•

Let images and sounds present themselves spontaneously to your eyes and ears as words do to the spirit of a creative writer.

•

X demonstrates a great stupidity when he says that to touch the masses there is no need of art.

•

Because you do not have to imitate, like painters, sculptors, novelists, the appearance of persons and objects (machines do that for you), your creation or invention confines itself to the ties you knot between the various bits of reality caught. There is also the choice of the bits. Your flair decides.

•

What ennobles an actor on the boards can make him vulgar on the screen (practice of one art in the form belonging to another).

•

Models. What they lose in apparent prominence during the shooting, they gain in depth and in truth

on the screen. It is the flattest and dullest parts that have in the end the most life.

•

They think this simplicity is a sign of meagre invention. (Racine, preface to *Bérénice*).[14]

•

Two simplicities. The bad: simplicity as starting-point, sought too soon. The good: simplicity as end-product, recompense for years of effort.

•

Corot: “One must not seek, one must wait.”

•

Model. His (untrained) voice gives us his intimate character and his philosophy, better than his physical aspect.

•

To TRANSLATE the invisible wind by the water it sculpts in passing.

•

Model. He shuts himself up in himself. So does X, that excellent actor. But he does it to reappear masked by acting, unrecognizable.

•

Models. Capable of eluding their own vigilance, capable of being divinely “themselves.”

•

Life cannot be rendered by photographic recopying of life, but by the secret laws in the midst of which you can feel your models moving.

•

With the centuries, the theatre has bourgeoisified. The CINEMA (photographed theatre) shows how far.

•

A whole gaggle of critics making no distinction between CINEMA and *cinematography*. Opening an eye now and then to the actors’ inadequate presence and performance, shutting it again at once. Obliged to like *in a lump* all that is projected on to the screens.

•

Resemblance, difference

Give more resemblance in order to obtain more difference. Uniform and unity of life bring out the nature and character of soldiers. Standing at attention, the immobility of them all shows up the individual signs of each.

The Real

The real, when it has reached the mind, is already not real any more. Our too thoughtful, too intelligent eye.

Two sorts of real: (1) The crude real recorded as it is by the camera; (2) what we call real and see deformed by our memory and some wrong reckonings.

Problem. To make what you see be seen, through the intermediary of a machine that does not see it as you see it.[15]

•

The persons and the objects in your film must *walk at the same pace, as companions*.

•

What is done without self-control, active (chemical) principle of your models.

•

Rightness of relationships fends off the colour repro. The newer the relations, the more lively is the effect of beauty.

•

To have *discernment* (precision in perception).

•

THE BONDS THAT BEINGS AND THINGS ARE WAITING FOR, IN ORDER TO LIVE.

•

X's film, in which the words are not bound to the action.

•

The true is not encrusted in the living persons and real objects you use. It is an air of truth that their images take on when you set them together in a certain order. *Vice versa*, the air of truth their images take on when you set them together in a certain order confers on these persons and objects a reality.

•

To put sentiments on his face and into his gestures is the art of the actor, is theatre. Not to put sentiments on his face and into his gestures is (still) not cinematography. Involuntarily expressive models (not wilfully inexpressive ones).

•

The eye (in general) superficial, the ear profound and inventive. A locomotive's whistle imprints in us a whole railroad station.

•

Your film must take off. Bombast and the picturesque hinder it from taking off.

•

Make visible what, without you, might perhaps never have been seen.

•

No psychology (of the kind which discovers only what it can explain).

•

When you do not know what you are doing and what you are doing is the best—that is inspiration.

•

Your camera passes through faces, provided no mimicry (intentional or not intentional) gets in between. Cinematographic films made of inner movements *which are seen*.

•

Images and sounds must sustain one another, from far and from near. No *independent* images or sounds.

•

The true is inimitable, the false untransformable.

•

Right intonations when your model exercises no control over them.

•

Models. No ostentation. Faculty of gathering into himself, of keeping, of not letting anything get out. A certain inward configuration common to them all. Eyes.

•

To your models: “Speak as if you were speaking to yourselves.” MONOLOGUE INSTEAD OF DIALOGUE.

•

They want to find the solution where all is enigma only.[16] (Pascal)

•

X, famous star, with the over-exposed too *intelligible* features.

•

Model. It is his non-rational, non-logical “I” that your camera records.

•

Model. You illumine him and he illumines you. The light you receive from him is added to the light he receives from you.

•

Economy

Make known that we are in the same place by repetition of the same noises and the same sonority.

•

Shooting with the same eyes and the same ears today as yesterday. Unity, homogeneity.

•

Choose your models well, so that they lead you where you want to go.

•

Models. Their way of being the people of your film is by being themselves, by remaining what they are. *(Even in contradiction with what you had imagined.)*

•

Music. It isolates your film from the life of your film (musical delectation). It is a powerful modifier and even destroyer of the real, like alcohol or dope.

•

Cutting. Phosphorus that wells up suddenly from your models, floats around them and binds them to the objects (blue of Cézanne, grey of El Greco).

•

Your genius is not in the counterfeiting of nature (actors, sets), but in your way of choosing and co-ordinating bits taken directly from it by machines.

•

Models. Mechanized outwardly. Intact, virgin within.

•

To communicate impressions, sensations.

•

X, looked at on the screen, right in the face, as though he were a long way off.

•

Model. His essence, neat.

•

Neither beautify nor uglify. Do not denature.

•

It is in its pure form that an art hits hard.

•

Your film is beginning when your secret wishes pass into your models.

•

An actor used in a film as on the stage, outside himself, *is not there*. His image is empty.

•

Retouch some real with some real.

•

To move people not with images likely to move us, but with relations of images that render them both

alive and moving.

•

The actor's creative simplification has its own nobility and its reason for existing on the stage. In films it does away with the complexity of the man he is and, with this, the contradictions and obscurities of his true "I."

•

Cutting. Passage of dead images to living images. Everything blossoms afresh.

•

Slow films in which everyone is galloping and gesticulating; swift films in which people hardly stir.

•

Do not use the same models in two films. (1) One would not believe in them. (2) They would look at themselves in the first film as one looks at oneself in the mirror, would want people to see them as they wish to be seen, would impose a discipline on themselves, would grow disenchanted as they corrected themselves.

•

See your film as a combination of lines and of volumes in movement apart from what it represents and signifies.

•

YOUR MODELS MUST NOT FEEL THEY ARE DRAMATIC.

•

Cut what would deflect attention elsewhere.

•

Quality of a new world which none of the existing arts allowed to be imagined.

•

Extreme complexity. Your films: attempts, trials.

•

Your images will release their phosphorus only in aggregating. (An actor wants to be phosphorescent right away.)

•

Model. The spark caught in his eye's pupil gives significance to his whole person.

•

Image. Reflection and reflector, accumulator and conductor.

•

Not beautiful photography, not beautiful images, but necessary images and photography.

•

To place the public opposite beings and things, not as some people place it arbitrarily by acquired habits (clichés), but as you place yourself according to your *unforeseeable* impressions and sensations. Never decide anything in advance.

•

The actor learning his part presupposes a “self” known in advance (which does not exist).

•

Shooting. Agony of making sure not to let slip any part of what I merely glimpse, of what I perhaps do not yet see and shall only later be able to see.

On Fragmentation[17]

This is indispensable if one does not want to fall into REPRESENTATION. See beings and things in their separate parts. Render them independent in order to give them a new dependence.

•

Displaying everything condemns CINEMA to cliché, obliges it to display things as everyone is in the habit of seeing them. Failing which, they would appear false or sham.

•

Intonations of voice, mimicries, gestures, conceived by the actor *in advance* and *at the time*.

•

Shooting. You will not know till much later if your film is worth the mountain range of efforts it is costing you.

•

The real is not dramatic. Drama will be born of a certain march of non-dramatic elements.

•

In his film X displays things having no appropriateness to each other, and so without bonds, and so dead.

•

Your film is not made for a stroll with the eyes, but for going right into, for being totally absorbed in.

•

Expression through compression. To put into an image what a writer would spin out over ten pages.

•

Failure of CINEMA. Ludicrous disproportion between immense possibilities and the result: the *Star-system*.

•

A director drives his actors to simulate fictitious human beings in the midst of objects that are not so. The false which he prefers will not change into true.

•

An actor, however excellent, limited to one type of creation (without shadows).

•

Borrowing the theatre's resources leads inevitably to the visual and aural picturesque.

•

One does not create by adding, but by taking away. To develop is another matter. (Not to spread out.)

•

Empty the pond to get the fish.

•

Against actors' assurance, set the charm of models who do not know what they are.

•

One same subject changes in accordance with images and sounds. Religious subjects receive their dignity and their elevation from the images and the sounds. Not (as people believe) the other way about: the image and sounds receive from the religious subjects . . .

•

To an actor, the camera is the eye of the public.

•

Models. It is to you, not to the public, that they give those things which it, perhaps, would not see (which you glimpse only). A secret and sacred trust.

•

An ice-cold commentary can warm, by contrast, tepid dialogues in a film. Phenomenon analogous to that of hot and cold in painting.

•

Silence, musical by an effect of resonance. The last syllable of the last word, or the last noise, like a held note.

•

Things too much in disorder, or too much in order, become equal, one no longer distinguishes them. They produce indifference and boredom.

•

Obvious *travelling* or *panning* shots do not correspond to the movements of the eye. This is to separate the eye from the body. (One should not use the camera as if it were a broom).

•

Models. You will be setting not the limits of their power, but those within which they will exercise it.

•

Quantity, enormity, falsity of means yielding place to simplicity and rightness. Everything brought back to the scale of *what suffices you*.

•

It is not a matter of acting “simple” or of acting “inward” but of not acting at all.

•

Cinematography films: emotional, not representational.

•

Provoke the unexpected. Expect it.

•

The CINEMA did not start from zero. Everything to be called into question.

•

A cry, a noise. Their resonance makes us guess at a house, a forest, a plain, a mountain; their rebound indicates to us the distances.

•

It is with something clean and precise that you will force the attention of inattentive eyes and ears.

•

Model. That which animates him (words, movements) is not something that paints him, as in a theatre, but something that obliges him to paint himself.

•

A CINEMA film reproduces the reality of the actor, at the same time as that of the man he is being.

•

Your public is not the public for books, stage shows, exhibitions or concerts. Taste in literature, in theatre, in painting or in music is not what you have to satisfy.

•

Let the cause follow the effect, not accompany it or precede it.[18]

•

Words do not always coincide with thought. Earlier, later. The aping of this non-coincidence in films is dreadful.

•

From the clash and sequence of images and sounds, a harmony of relationships must be born.

•

Model. Closed, does not enter into communication with the outside world except unawares.

•

Create expectations to fulfil them.

•

Model. You will pin down his image intact, not deformed by his intelligence, nor by yours.

•

Without abandoning the line, which must never be abandoned, and without letting go anything of you, allow camera and tape recorder to catch, for the space of a flash, the new and unforeseen which your model offers you.

•

A virtuoso makes us hear the music not as it is written, but as he feels it. Actor-virtuoso.

•

Don’t show all sides of things. A margin of indefiniteness.

•

Shooting is going out to meet something. Nothing in the unexpected that is not secretly expected by you.

•

Not only new relationships, but a new manner of re- articulating and adjusting.

•

Face to face with the real, your taut attention shows up the mistakes of your original conception.[19] It is your camera that corrects them. But the impression felt by you is the sole *reality* that has interest.

•

Shooting is not making something definitive, it is making preparations.

•

Several takes of the same thing, like a painter who does several pictures or drawings of the same subject and, each fresh time, *progresses towards rightness*.

•

Model who, *in spite of himself and of you*, frees the real man from the fictitious man you had imagined.

•

The actor is double. The alternate presence of him and of *the other* is what the public has been schooled to cherish.

•

Mark out clearly the limits within which you seek to let yourself be surprised by your model. Infinite surprises within a finite frame.

•

The crude real will not by itself yield truth.

•

Your camera catches not only physical movements that are inapprehensible by pencil, brush or pen, but also certain states of soul recognizable by indices which it alone can reveal.

•

Star-system

Makes nothing of the immense power of attraction which belongs to the new and unforeseen. Film after film, subject after subject, confronting the same faces that one cannot believe in.

•

Transplantation

Images and sounds are fortified by being transplanted.

•

Accustom the public to divining the whole of which they are given only a part. Make people diviners. Make them desire it.

Exercises

Put your models through reading exercises, designed to equalize the syllables and to do away with an *intentional* personal effect.

The script made uniform and regular. Expression *that can pass unnoticed*, obtained by almost imperceptible slowings and quickenings and by the dull and the brilliant in the voice. Timbre and tempi (timbre = stamp).

•

What our eyes and ears require is not the realistic persona but the real person.

•

Films whose slowness and silences are indistinguishable from the slownesses and silences of the audience are ruled out.

•

The actor's performance is definitive, untransformable. It remains what it is.

•

In the Greek Catholic liturgy: "Be attentive!"

•

CINEMA, radio, television, magazines are a school of inattention: people look without seeing, listen in without hearing.

Model. He paints his self-portrait with what you dictate to him (gestures, words) and the likeness, rather as if it were indeed a painting, has in it as much of you as of him.

•

Colour gives force to your images. It is a means of rendering the real more true. But if this real is not wholly real, it stresses its unlikeliness (its non-existence).

•

Model. Has become automatic, protected against any thought.

•

Films are at the stage of academic painting. Bouguereau's *Siege of Paris*, where one seems to be looking at soldiers in some movie action which they have learnt.

•

See at once, in what you are seeing, what will be seen. Your camera does not take things as you see them. (It does not take what you make them mean.)

•

It is profitable that what you find should not be what you were expecting. Intrigued, excited by the unexpected.

•

The *collocazione* of the images and sounds.

•

Make the objects look as if they want to be there.

•

Photography is descriptive, neat image confined to description.

•

Model. Beautiful with all the movements he does not make (could make).

•

The most ordinary word, when put into place, suddenly acquires brilliance. That is the brilliance with which your images must shine.

•

1. As will become clear, "cinematography" for Bresson has the special meaning of creative film-making which thoroughly exploits the nature of film as such. It should not be confused with the work of a cameraman.

2. . . . *sans manquer de naturel, manquent de nature*.

3. *To "cinematograph" someone is not to give him life. It is because they are living that actors make a stage play alive.*

4. *Ti avverto se in qualche concerto troverai scritto solo dovrà essere suonato da un solo violino*. [*Note that if in any concerto the word* solo *is written it should be played by one violin only*.] (Vivaldi).

5. At Hedin we all stayed at the Hôtel de France. During the night I was haunted by Napoleon's saying: "I make my battle plans from the spirit of my sleeping soldiers." ["*Je fais mes plans de bataille avec l'esprit de mes soldats endormis*"]

6. Except, of course, the music played by visible instruments.

7. A certain man demanded of one of our loytring rogues, whom in the deep of frosty Winter he saw wandring up and downe with nothing but his shirt about him, and yet as blithe and lusty as an other who keepes himselfe muffled and wrapt in warme furres up to the ears, how he could have patience to go so. *And have not you, good Sir*, (answered he) *your face all bare? Imagine I am all face*. (Montaigne, *Essays*, I, chapter XXI; John Florio's translation). [Je ne sais qui demandait à un de nos gueux qu'il voyait

en chemise en plain hyver aussi scarrebillat que tel qui se tient ammitoné dans les martres jusques aux oreilles, comme il pouvait avoir patience: “Et vous, Monsieur,” répondit-il, “vous avez bien la face découverte: or moy, je suis tout face.”]

8. “I often paint bouquets on the side where I have not planned them.” (Auguste Renoir to Matisse. Quoted from memory.) [“*Je peins souvent les bouquets du côté où je ne les ai pas préparés*.”]

9. *Les mouvements de l’âme naissaient avec même progrès que ceux du corps*.

10. CINEMA and theatre stick together for convenience. Mixing them up is a practical interest.

11. And *vice versa*, if the ear is entirely won, give nothing to the eye.

12. Does so because a mechanism gives rise to the unknown, and not because one has found this unknown in advance.

13. Cutting, October 1956?

14. *Ils pensent que cette simplicité est une marque de peu d’invention*.

15. And to make what you understand be understood, through the intermediary of a machine that does not understand it as you do.

16. *Ils veulent trouver la solution là où tout n’est qu’énigme*.

17. “A town or countryside at a distance is a town, a countryside; but as one approaches, those are houses, trees, tiles, leaves, grasses, ants, ants’ legs, to infinity.” (Pascal) [*Une ville, une campagne, de loin est une ville et une campagne; mais à mesure qu’on s’approche, ce sont des maisons, des arbres, des tuiles, des feuilles, des herbes, des fourmis, des jambes de fourmis à l’infini*.]

18. The other day I was walking through the gardens by Notre-Dame and saw approaching a man whose eyes caught something behind me, which I could not see: at once they lit up. If, at the same time as I saw the man, I had perceived the young woman and the child towards whom he now began running, that happy face of his would not have struck me so; indeed I might not have noticed it.

19. Mistakes on paper.

FURTHER NOTES
1960–1974

Wondrous, wondrous, wondrous machine!—Purcell

•

"How extraordinary, is it not, that a man should be a man!"[1] This is perhaps what camera and tape recorder say to each other in front of G (model).

•

Be as ignorant of what you are going to catch as is a fisherman of what is at the end of his fishing rod. *(The fish that arises from nowhere.)*

•

When the public is ready to feel before understanding, what a number of films reveal and explain everything to it!

I remember an old film: *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*. Life was suspended during thirty wonderful seconds,[2] *during which nothing happened*. In reality, everything happened. Cinematography, the art, with images, of *representing* nothing.

•

G divinely man, F divinely woman (models), without any trick. The TRICK is what is hidden, not let out (not revealed), in them.

•

Leonardo recommends *(Notebooks)* thinking hard of the end, thinking first and foremost of the end. The end is the screen, which is only a surface. Submit your film to the reality of the screen, as a painter submits his picture to the reality of the canvas itself and of the colours applied on it, the sculptor his figures to the reality of the marble or the bronze.

•

Ten properties of an object, according to Leonardo: light and dark, colour and substance, form and position, distance and nearness, movement and stillness.

•

The people I pass in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées appear to me like marble figures moved forward by springs. But let their eyes meet mine, and at once these walking and gazing statues become human.

•

Two men facing each other, *eye to eye*. Two cats attracting each other . . .

•

To defeat the false powers of photography.

•

Hollow idea of "art cinema," of "art films." Art films, the ones most devoid of it.

•

What I reject as too simple is the thing that is important and that one must dig into. Stupid mistrust of the simple things.

•

Evolution in a zone forbidden to the existing arts, unexploitable by them.
The theatre is something that is too much known, cinematography a thing too unknown up to now.

•

The public's irresistible need to see, get near, touch the stars in the flesh, a need *frustrated* by the photographed theatre. Autographs.

•

Your film's beauty will not be in the images (postcardism) but in the ineffable that they will disengage.

•

Many people are needed in order to make a film, but only one who makes, unmakes, remakes his images and sounds, returning at every second to the initial impression or sensation which brought these to birth and is incomprehensible to the other people.

•

To forge for oneself iron laws, if only in order to obey or disobey them *with difficulty*.

•

In X's eyes the cinema is a special industry; in Y's an enlarged theatre. Z sees the box office figures.

•

Telephone. His voice makes him visible.

•

ECONOMY. Racine (to his son Louis): I know your handwriting well enough, without your having to sign your name.[3]

•

The future of cinematography belongs to a new race of young solitaries who will shoot films by putting their last penny into it and not let themselves be taken in by the material routines of the trade.

•

In your passion for the true, people may see nothing but faddism.

•

Laugh at a bad reputation. Fear a good one that you could not sustain.

•

Admire without limits the simplicity and modesty of the great artists of the past, exposed to the arrogance of the nobility.

•

Think carefully what this meticulous work requires of you and that an actor (professional or not) remains an actor, even deep in a desert.

•

Prodigious, heaven-sent machines[4]—to use them merely for rehashing something phoney will appear, in less than fifty years' time, irrational and absurd.

•

The public does not know what it wants. Impose on it your decisions, your delights.[5]

•

Is it for singing always the same song that the nightingale is so admired?

•

Novelty is not originality nor modernity.[6]

•

Proust says that Dostoyevsky is original in composition above all. It is an extraordinarily complex and close-meshed whole, purely inward, with currents and counter-currents like those of the sea, a thing that is found also in Proust (in other ways so different) and whose equivalent would go well with a film.

•

(1963) Left Rome abruptly, abandoned irrevocably the preparatory work for *Genesis*, to cut short idiotic discussions and desecrating obstruction. How strange it is that people can ask you to do what they themselves would certainly be prevented from doing, because they do not know what it is!

•

The things one can express with the hand, with the head, with the shoulders! . . . How many useless and encumbering words then disappear! What economy!

•

Shudderings of images awakening.

•

I have dreamed of my film making itself as it goes along under my gaze, like a painter's eternally fresh canvas.

•

It is from being constrained to a mechanical regularity, it is from a mechanism that emotion will be born. To understand this, think of certain great pianists.

•

A great non-virtuoso pianist, of the Lipatti kind, strikes notes that are rigorously equal: minims, each the same length, same intensity; quavers, semiquavers, etc., likewise. He does not slap emotion on to the keys. He waits for it. It comes, and fills his fingers, the piano, him, the audience.

•

Production of emotion determined by a resistance to emotion.

•

Bach at the organ, admired by a pupil, answered: "It's a matter of striking the notes at exactly the right moment."

•

It is as if there are two TRUTHS: one that is dull, flat, boring, at least in the eyes of those who daub it with falsity; the other . . .

•

For want of truth, the public gets hooked on the false. Falconetti's way of casting her eyes to heaven, in Dreyer's film, used to draw tears.

•

These horrible days—when shooting film disgusts me, when I am exhausted, powerless in the face of so many obstacles—are part of my method of work.

•

A highly compressed film will not yield its best at the first go. People see in it at first what seems like something they have seen before. (There ought to be in Paris one quite small, very well equipped cinema, in which only one or two films would be shown each year.)

•

Precision of aim lays one open to hesitations. Debussy: "I've spent a week deciding on one chord rather than another."

•

Do not draw back from prodigies. Command the moon, the sun. Let loose the thunder and the lightning.

•

What damage, not only among the public, is done by idle, out-of-date criticism that judges according to the optics of the stage!

•

Reject historical films whose effect would be "theatre" or "masquerade." (In my *Trial of Joan of Arc* I have tried to avoid "theatre" and "masquerade," but to arrive at a non-historical truth by using historical words.)

•

Oscars to actors whose body, face and voice do not seem to be theirs, do not produce any certainty that they belong to them.

•

It is useless and silly to work specially for a public. I cannot try what I am making, at the moment of making it, except on myself. Besides, all that matters is to make well.

•

Be precise in the form, not always in the substance (if you can).

•

It is what I do not get to know of F and G (models) that makes them so interesting to me.

•

Prefer what intuition whispers in your ear to what you have done and redone ten times in your head.

•

Ideas gathered from reading will always be bookish ideas. Go to the persons and objects directly.

•

Have a painter's eye. The painter creates by looking.

•

The pistol-shot of the painter's eye dislocates the real. Then the painter puts it up again and organizes it in that same eye, according to his taste, his methods, his Ideal Beauty.

•

Every movement reveals us[7] (Montaigne). But it only reveals us if it is automatic (not commanded, not willed).

•

Talking of automatism, this also from Montaigne: *We cannot command our haire to stand on end; nor our skinne to startle for desire or feare. Our hands are often carried where we direct them not*.[8]

•

Subject, technique, actors' style go by fashion. Result, a sort of prototype, which one film every two or three years changes for a new one.

•

MASTERPIECES. The masterpieces of painting or sculpture, such as the Gioconda or the Venus of Milo, have so many reasons for being admired that they are admired for both the good and the bad ones. CINEMA masterpieces are often admired only for the bad ones.

•

X, to follow the fashion, puts into his films a little of everything, like a painter who works with too many colours.

•

While some people, under the influence of CINEMA, are trying to change the theatre, others, as they shoot their films, get all tied up in its ancient habits (rules, codes).

•

MISUNDERSTANDINGS. No (or hardly any) harsh criticism or praise that is not based on some misunderstanding.

•

One ought to be born with a special sense for reconciliation and harmony.

•

In this non-picturesque film, in which nothing theatrical lingers on, B sees only emptiness.

•

Always the same joy, the same astonishment at the fresh significance of an image whose place I have just changed.

•

The things we bring off by chance—what power they have!

•

“That’s it” or “that’s not it,” at the first glance. Reasoning comes afterwards *(to approve our first glance)*.

•

Hostility to art is also hostility to the new, to the unforeseen.

•

Take action *first*.
In London a gang broke open the safe in a jeweller’s shop and laid hands on pearl necklaces, rings, gold, precious stones. They found, also, the key of the nearby jeweller’s safe, which they cleaned out, and this safe contained the key of a third jeweller’s safe. *(Newspaper reports)*

•

Get things away from habit, de-chloroform them.

•

In the NUDE, all that is not beautiful is obscene.

•

On the indispensable, absolute confidence in oneself, this from Madame de Sévigné: “When I listen to myself only, I do wonders.”[9]

•

Equality of all things. Cézanne painting with the same eye and the same soul a fruit dish, his son, the Montagne Sainte-Victoire.

•

Cézanne: “At each touch I risk my life.”[10]

•

Build your film on white, on silence and on stillness.

•

Silence is necessary to music but is not part of music. Music leans on it.

•

The number of films that are patched up with music! People flood a film with music. They are preventing us from seeing that there is nothing in those images.

•

It is only recently and gradually that I have suppressed the music and have used silence as an element of composition and means to emotion. Must say this or incur dishonesty.

•

Let nothing be changed and all be different.

•

Montesquieu says, about humour, that “its difficulty consists in making you find in the thing a new feeling which nevertheless comes from the thing.”[11]

•

Do not try, and do not wish, to draw tears from the public with the tears of your models, but with this image rather than that one, this sound rather than that one, exactly in their place.

•

MAKE YOURSELF BE BELIEVED. Dante in exile, walking in the streets of Verona—people whispered to each other that he goes to Hell when he chooses and brings back news from there.

•

What do I start from? From the subject to be expressed? From sensation? Do I start twice?

•

What is—face to face with the real—this intermediary work of the imagination?

•

To be scrupulous. Reject everything about the real that *does not become true*. (The dreadful reality of the false.)

•

What H (model) hides from me he hides not to appear to himself or to me as what he is not, but from modesty.

•

DIVINATION—how can one not associate that name with the two sublime machines I use for my work? Camera and tape recorder carry me far away from the intelligence which complicates everything.

1. *"Comme c'est extraordinaire, n'est-ce pas, qu'un homme soit un homme!"* Baudelaire

2. The thirty seconds of a flight across Tokyo by an American interceptor during the war.

3. *Je connais assez votre écriture, sans que vous soyez obligé de mettre votre nom*.

4. Camera and tape recorder.

5. [Fr: *tes volontés, tes voluptés*. "Your decisions, your delights"—but stronger also: almost "your urges, your orgies."]

6. Rousseau: I did not seek to do like the others nor otherwise. [*Je ne cherchai pas à faire comme les autres ni autrement*.]

7. *Tout mouvement nous descouvre*.

8. *Essays*, I, chapter xx; John Florio's translation. [*Nous ne commandons pas à nos cheveux de se hérisser et à nostre peau de fremir de désir où de crainte; la main se porte souvent où nous ne l'envoyons pas*.]

9. "*Quand je n'écoute que moi, je fais des merveilles*."

10. "*A chaque tusche, je risque ma vie*."

11. "*Sa difficulté consiste à vous faire touver un sentiment nouveau dans la chose qui vient pourtant de la chose*."